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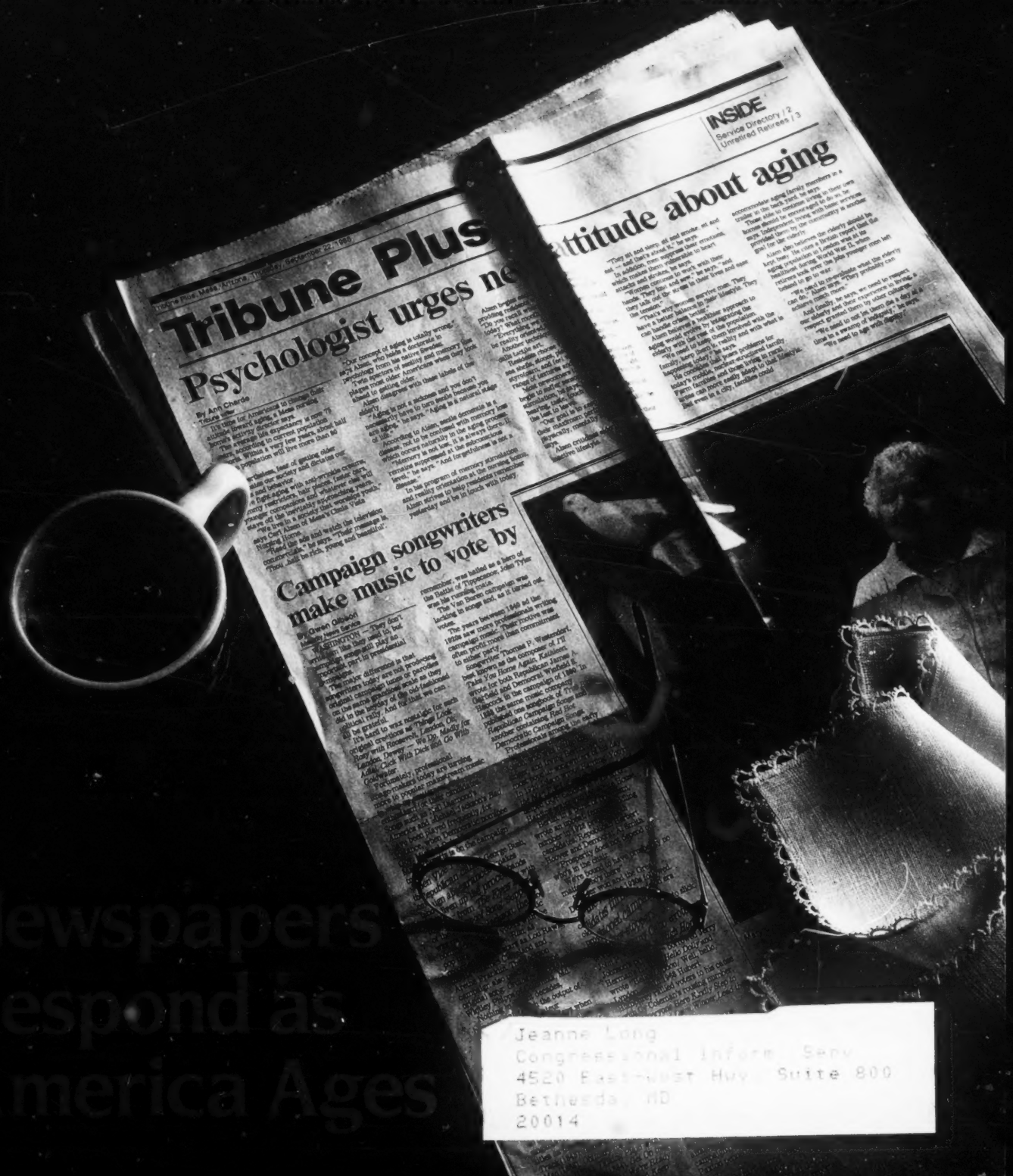

Newspapers Respond as America Ages

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Special Report *Older people are becoming more numerous, more affluent—and more attractive in the eyes of newspapers. All too often, they have been overlooked in the pursuit of high-spending younger adults. Now there are signs that newspapers are losing their grip on these most faithful readers, people 55 and older who make up nearly a third of all readership. Among them, readership has dropped by 9 percent in 20 years—less than the 16-percent loss of overall readership, but a drop that has spurred publishers to find ways to strengthen older readers' loyalty.* **22**

Consider the alternatives *Many "alternative" newspapers have developed a formula that pleases upscale readers.* **6**

The appeal of co-op *Up to $15 billion in co-op advertising will be up for grabs next year. Here's how to get some of it.* **10**

'Tis the season to be tipping *Christmas cheer for newspaper carriers is down because paying by mail is up. But they still are dropping hints.* **14**

Erasable disks *Newspapers are eagerly waiting to apply this emerging technology, which could offer low-cost pagination with high-volume storage capacity.* **18**

Turnover myths debunked *Newsrooms at small dailies fare no worse than most small businesses in their vacancy rates.* **30**

The un-pacific rim *Grant copy editors their discontent and idiosyncracies, says a veteran editor. They are unsung, if cranky, heroes.* **34**

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Fires rekindle concerns *Recent fires temporarily crippled three metropolitan newspapers and caused re-examination of safety policy.* **66**

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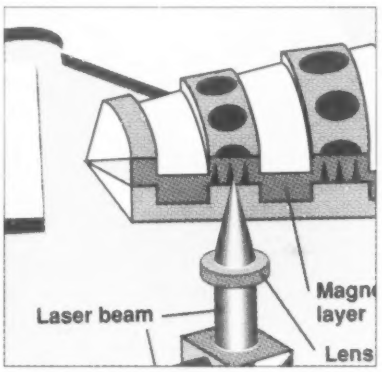

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CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Readership, market problems dictate coordinated response

There is nothing like a little pain to focus a publisher's attention. And focused we are, for costs are up, advertising linage is down, market penetration is off, and too many future readers (if one listens to the portenders of doom) are either illiterate, lazy or both.

Examined in isolation, it would seem that many of what were once considered "hometown values" are undergoing rapid change. And too often they seem to be at our expense. Just look:

The local department store is part of some leveraged buyout, thus affecting our advertising. Women's skirts are either too long or too short, so there goes more linage. Major S&Ls are running out of money, while, at the same time, $20-billion doesn't seem too much to offer for a cookie and cream cheese company.

Arthur Ochs Sulzberger

The Japanese, who already "own" Hawaii, continue to acquire the rest of America while the United States has become the leading debtor nation. It all adds up to lousy business.

Fortunately, our competitors are also affected by change. The growth of cable TV, for instance, with the concurrent opportunity for the viewer to flip through 60 channels, is creating problems not only for the local TV operator but for the networks as well. And the proliferation of the 15-second commercial causes a mental fermentation that blends one ad with another. One has to be careful these days not to pour detergent into the dogfood.

Direct mail has its problems also. Like clutter on the television set, it creates clutter in the mailbox. Just order one item from a catalog and then go away for a few days and see what happens. The fact is catalogs reproduce in the dark environment of a mailbox, a hitherto unknown scientific fact.

Seriously and fortunately, we have both the time and the strength as an industry to create sensible solutions to our problems.

Your ANPA Board of Directors is keenly aware of the high priority given by the members to readership and market problems. At a recent meeting of the directors of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau, these concerns were re-emphasized. It was determined that there would shortly be a small meeting of the officers of these two organizations to coordinate efforts and work for the common good.

Each year the newspaper industry spends a considerable amount of money funding a wide range of related organizations—from ANPA and NAB to smaller, more specialized groups like ANCAM and INAME or regional associations like Inland or SNPA. It would seem important this year that we make a real effort to keep all of these organizations rowing in the same direction. After all, they are taking the trip at your expense.

To help provide the focus we need to address today's challenges, ANPA along with NAB will take the first steps in this cooperative approach. It is my belief that together we have a good shot at identifying and solving our problems and that with the help of our sister organizations we can marshal both the funds and the talent to use the current economic pain as an incentive to build for a strong tomorrow.

Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, ANPA Chairman

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The Vacancy Rate

Survey shows small dailies' newsroom churn may not be as bad as popularly believed

BY MARTY THARP

Everybody knows what happens on small dailies. Underpaid, fairly inexperienced journalists come and go, using these newspapers as stepping stones to bigger and better jobs.

A high rate of newsroom vacancies [**presstime**, June 1988, p. 110] has been, is and probably will continue to be a major problem. Right?

Not necessarily.

A new survey, the first national one to concentrate on employee departures at small dailies, contradicts some of the profession's folklore.

The survey shows that in a given year one-fourth of the newspapers' newsroom positions become vacant. This compares with an annual vacancy rate of 17-23 percent for small businesses overall, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

BLS breaks vacancies down into two kinds: "turnover," which it defines as leaving a job to go into an entirely different field, and "mobility," leaving a job to take a position at another company in the same field.

The survey found that an average of 11.2 percent of newspaper employees leave the profession altogether in a year's time, whether they quit, retire or are fired. This rate of "turnover" is about the same as that for all small businesses, for the BLS statistical category of "technical-professional employees" and for the media in general.

On the matter of "mobility," the newspaper rate was determined to be 13.8 percent annually. This, too, was in line with BLS data.

Newspapers with fewer than five newsroom employees had the highest rate of employee movement. (See Table 1.)

Daily newspapers with circulations of 25,000 or less were chosen for the survey. They make up 66.8 percent of U.S. dailies and serve more than 1,000 communities.

Questionnaires were mailed in January and February of this year to 300 such papers. The top newsroom editor and two working journalists on the staff, including reporters and copy editors, were questioned at each paper. A 45-percent return from the top editors and a 43-percent return from the other staffers provided the data.

Let's look at some of the folklore—and what the survey found:

• *Vacancy rates on small daily newspapers is viewed as a big problem.* Untrue. The editors did not list turnover or mobility as major concerns. Their major worries are competition, availability of resources and understaffing.

• *But I heard of an editor who replaced his entire staff within a year.* Indeed, one newspaper in the study reported a 270-percent change in staff in one year. Anecdotal material like this is startling, but it is definitely the exception. Seventy-four percent of the editors said they replaced, or had

Table 1
Annual Vacancies at Small Dailies' Newsrooms

Staff size	Number of newspapers represented	Number of journalists represented	Number who left	Turnover[1]	Mobility[2]
1 to 5	20	118	51 (43%)	18 (15%)	33 (28%)
6 to 10	40	383	124 (32%)	73 (19%)	51 (13%)
11 to 15	24	350	97 (28%)	48 (14%)	49 (14%)
16 to 20	16	260	49 (19%)	31 (12%)	18 (7%)
21 to 25	12	272	60 (21%)	27 (10%)	33 (12%)
over 25	6	184	23 (13%)	8 (4%)	15 (8%)

[1]Leaving the newspaper business entirely
[2]Going to work for another paper

Table 2
Experience Level of Journalists at Small Dailies

Years as journalist	Number of jobs held				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1 year	88%	9%	2%	0%	0%
1 to 2 years	60%	31%	9%	0%	0%
2 to 3 years	47%	34%	19%	0%	0%
3 to 5 years	41%	30%	22%	5%	3%
5 to 10 years	31%	37%	22%	6%	4%
over 10 years	25%	30%	23%	6%	16%

Tharp, a former newspaper reporter and editor, is assistant professor in the Department of Technical Journalism at Colorado State University. Funding for her study was provided by Gannett Foundation, Buckner News Alliance, Nixon Newspapers, CSU and the University of Colorado.

to replace, only one or two employees in the past year.

• *Nobody stays very long at these small daily newspapers.* Untrue. The mean length of time the working journalists said they had spent at their current jobs was 4.9 years. Younger people, those 20 to 25 years old, moved an average of every 1.6 years, but those over 40 remained for 9.3. While nearly half of the working journalists reported they were at their first jobs, 26 percent had been at their jobs for more than five years.

• *Young workers will always be mobile, and they make up the majority of the staff members.* Part untrue. The notion that younger workers are continually job hopping is somewhat overblown. Sixty percent of the respondents who were in their second year as working journalists were still at their first jobs. (See Table 2.)

These younger journalists do constitute majorities in the newsrooms, where 57 percent of the journalists are under 30 years of age. Yet 21 percent are from 31 to 40 years old, and 22 percent are over 40. This older group appears to be a solid core of longtime employees who genuinely enjoy their newspapers and their towns.

Younger people, those 20 to 25 years old, moved an average of every 1.6 years, but those over 40 remained for 9.3.

• *Poor pay is the main source of discontent among working journalists.* Untrue. Although editors thought poor pay was a major disadvantage of their newspapers as a place to work, their staffers complained just as much about overwork, having to put in overtime (often with no additional compensation), and an insufficient number of people to do the job right.

The staffers might easily have listed pay, however, because the survey found entry-level people receiving an average of $243 per week. All of the working journalists combined, no matter how much experience, were paid an average of just $290 weekly. Women earned 12 percent less than men.

The journalists said they work at the small dailies, despite the low salaries, in order to gain experience. Appealing aspects of their jobs included the variety of assignments and the opportunity for personal achievement.

• *Journalists who remain on the newsroom staffs at small dailies are generally satisfied.* True. An extensive portion of the survey measured job satisfaction, and the majority of the working journalists responded that they were satisfied with the nature of their work. The only areas where dissatisfaction outweighed satisfaction were general management of the newspaper and supervisors' attitudes toward workers.

And yet 75 percent of the journalists said they *intend* to leave their jobs within three years, and even more—96 percent—said they believe they made the wrong career choice. Paradoxically, just as many said they find newspaper work highly satisfying—more so than work in any other field.

The highest levels of dissatisfaction are among workers in their mid-to-late 30s, many of whom indicated they feel stuck in their jobs without the opportunity to advance. In some cases, these are workers in two-career households or people with family commitments that restrict possible movement to other locations.

• *It doesn't matter that newsroom staffers leave.* Untrue. Routine news work can be done by inexperienced journalists, but it takes time to develop journalists who know the community, who have cultivated sources and who know where to look for stories. One of the concerns raised by editors was the relative inexperience of some staffers. Even if there is a ready pool of journalism graduates to fill the vacated spaces, it takes time and money to replace employees.

While the study disproves much of the folklore, when even a quarter of the staff leaves, managers have problems. And they may not be able to deal effectively with these problems because few have the management training that could help them.

The study shows that while 70 percent of the editors have more than 10 years' experience as editors, only a third have any management training. Other businesses train managers in the skills that help maintain motivated, contented employees because they know this can help reduce the talent drain. The small dailies studied, whether group-owned or independently owned, are not yet providing much training for those who manage newsroom people.

So the folklore will remain, even though survey results contradict much of it. □

NOTE

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